Sidney Powell's secret intelligence contractor witness is a pro-Trump podcaster

By Jon Swaine

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As she asked the U.S. Supreme Court this month to overturn President Trump's election loss, the attorney Sidney Powell cited testimony from a secret witness presented as a former intelligence contractor with insights on a foreign conspiracy to subvert democracy.

Powell told courts that the witness is an expert who could show that overseas corporations helped shift votes to President-elect Joe Biden. The witness's identity must be concealed from the public, Powell has said, to protect her "reputation, professional career and personal safety."

The Washington Post identified the witness by determining that portions of her affidavit match, sometimes verbatim, a blog post that the pro-Trump podcaster Terpsichore Maras-Lindeman published in November 2019. In an interview, Maras-Lindeman confirmed that she wrote the affidavit and said she viewed it as her contribution to a fight against the theft of the election.

"This is everybody's duty," she said. "It's just not fair."

In a recent civil fraud case, attorneys for the state of North Dakota said that Maras-Lindeman falsely claimed to be a medical doctor and to have both a PhD and an MBA. They said she used multiple aliases and social security numbers and created exaggerated online résumés as part of what they called "a persistent effort . . . to deceive others."

Powell's reliance on Maras-Lindeman's testimony may raise further questions about her judgment and the strength of her arguments at a time when she is becoming an increasingly influential adviser to the president. Trump's legal team distanced itself from Powell last month after she falsely claimed Republican state officials took bribes to rig the election. But she has visited the White House three times in the past week, once to participate in an Oval Office meeting. Trump has weighed naming Powell a special counsel to investigate the election, according to previous reports.

Maras-Lindeman, 42, served in the Navy for less than a year more than two decades ago and has said she worked later as a government contractor and part-time interpreter. She has identified herself as a "trained cryptolinguist."

North Dakota's assertions about her credentials came in a civil case brought by the state's attorney general in 2018 over a purported charitable event she tried to organize in Minot, N.D., where she and her family resided. Attorneys for the state said she used money she collected — ostensibly to fund homeless shelters and wreaths for veterans' graves — on purchases for herself at McDonald's, QVC and elsewhere.

A judge ultimately found that Maras-Lindeman violated consumer protection laws by, among other things, misspending money she raised and soliciting donations while misrepresenting her experience and education. He ordered her to pay more than $25,000.

Maras-Lindeman has appealed to the state Supreme Court. In court filings and in her interview with The Post, she denied mishandling the funds or misleading donors. She blamed identity theft and bureaucratic failings for a proliferation of variations on her name and social security numbers associated with her.

Maras-Lindeman also claimed that she was targeted by the state for political reasons, noting that around that time she was exploring running for mayor of Minot — under the slogan "Make Minot Great Again." She said that in 2018 she assisted the campaign of David C. Thompson, the Democratic challenger to longtime Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem (R). Thompson is now Maras-Lindeman's defense attorney.

Thompson said in an interview that the case was a "vindictive exercise" and was excessive given the relatively small amounts of money in question. "They took a missile to kill a fly," he said.

In an interview, Stenehjem — who signed a brief this month asking the Supreme Court to take up a case that sought to overturn the election — dismissed the claim that his investigation was politically motivated and said that anyone working with Maras-Lindeman should "back away" from her.

In a text message, Powell did not directly address questions about Maras-Lindeman's fraud case and credentials. "I don't have the same information you do," she wrote to The Post.

Powell's lawsuits — litigation she has referred to as "the kraken," after a Scandinavian mythological sea monster — rely in key respects on a handful of anonymous expert witnesses. Among them is a purported military intelligence expert identified in court filings as "Spyder." The Post reported this month that the witness is an I.T. consultant named Joshua Merritt who has never worked in military intelligence. Rather, Merritt spent the bulk of his decade in the Army as a wheeled-vehicle mechanic.

Like Merritt, Maras-Lindeman told The Post she had never spoken directly to Powell or anyone working on her legal team. She said she distributed the affidavit widely to like-minded people and was unaware it had come to Powell's attention until it appeared as an exhibit in one of her cases.

Maras-Lindeman's 37-page affidavit outlines a purported conspiracy by the Canadian company Dominion Voting Systems, which sells voting machines used in some states, and Scytl, a Spain-based firm that provides election software. She claims that votes cast on Dominion machines in key states were hacked as they passed through Scytl tallying systems and rigged in favor of Biden.

"The vote is not safe using these machines not only because of the method used for ballot 'cleansing' to maintain anonymity but the EXPOSURE to foreign interference and possible domestic bad actors," she writes in the affidavit.

Like Trump and many of his supporters, Maras-Lindeman points to election night spikes in Biden's vote totals — explained by officials as merely the result of densely populated areas reporting their counts — as evidence of a "digital fix" involving abrupt dumps of bogus votes.

In a statement last month, Dominion described allegations leveled against it by Powell and other Trump supporters as "baseless, senseless, physically impossible, and unsupported by any evidence whatsoever." Scytl said in a statement that it "does NOT tabulate, tally or count votes in US public elections," had no relationship with Dominion, and that its U.S. operations are run by a Tampa-based subsidiary.

Last week, Dominion said it had written to Powell to demand that she retract what the company said were defamatory accusations.

Federal judges have rejected all four of the complaints Powell has filed, two of which — in Wisconsin and Arizona — included Maras-Lindeman's affidavit.

In Wisconsin, a federal judge ruled that Powell's request that the results of the election be overturned is "outside the limits" of the court's power. Attorneys for Gov. Tony Evers (D), in seeking the dismissal, said the complaint was "rampant with wild speculation and conspiratorial conclusions, and simply without any basis in law or fact."

A federal judge in Arizona wrote that allegations "that find favor in the public sphere of gossip and innuendo cannot be a substitute for earnest pleadings and procedure in federal court" and "most certainly cannot be the basis for upending Arizona's 2020 General Election."

Powell has appealed the cases to the U.S. Supreme Court, where she is seeking to have them consolidated.

Maras-Lindeman, who goes by Tore (pronounced "Tory"), spent recent weeks in Washington with a group of fellow Trump supporters working to bolster Powell's legal campaign, according to social media posts and statements on her podcast, "Tore Says." The group included Millie Weaver, a former correspondent for the far-right website Infowars, who released a documentary over the summer — "Shadowgate" — that helped propel Maras-Lindeman to prominence among conspiracy theorists on the right.

Maras-Lindeman told her listeners on Dec. 7 that she was speaking from "the belly of the beast" and that a group of Trump loyalists was working to take action against those who had stolen the president's victory.

"There are really good people — patriots — gathered, working hard to ensure that they not only get to the bottom of what happened during this election . . . but they're also seeking to prosecute," she said.

Maras-Lindeman spent time at Trump's hotel in downtown Washington and interviewed Patrick Byrne, the millionaire Overstock.com founder and Trump backer who has said he is funding a team of "cybersleuths" to scrutinize the election. Byrne and Maras-Lindeman told The Post he is not funding her.

In past episodes, Maras-Lindeman has discussed conspiracy theories, including one that baselessly accused high-ranking Democrats of human trafficking centered at a D.C. pizzeria. In an episode last year, she said, "What we realize is that this Pizzagate stuff, this satanic constant abuse of children, is an actual real thing."

Maras-Lindeman, who is of Greek heritage, joined the Navy in December 1996 and spent eight months training in Illinois and Florida as an airman recruit before departing the service in August 1997, according to a Navy record.

In their civil case, North Dakota state attorneys said that Maras-Lindeman created a profile on Together We Served, an online veteran community, that incorrectly depicted an extensive military career.

The profile, which is no longer online, said that Maras-Lindeman reached the rank of lieutenant, served in the combat zones of Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, and in the Office of Naval Intelligence, and was awarded multiple medals including a Purple Heart.

In the interview, Maras-Lindeman denied creating the profile and said whoever did had misstated the details of her career. She previously posted to Twitter a purported copy of her Navy separation paperwork, which said that she specialized in communications and intelligence.

Neither the record provided to The Post nor the paperwork Maras-Lindeman posted online stated a reason for her departure, but the papers she posted said that the character of her discharge was "general (under honorable conditions)."

In response to questions about the nature of the discharge, a Navy spokesman referred to the Navy Military Personnel Manual. The manual said it means, "The quality of the member's service has been honest and faithful; however, significant negative aspects of the member's conduct or performance of duty outweighed positive aspects of the member's service record."

In her affidavit, Maras-Lindeman identifies herself as a former "private contractor with experience gathering and analyzing foreign intelligence" and says that from 1999 to 2014 she had responsibility for delegating tasks to other contractors working for the United States and allied nations. She stood by that account in her interview with The Post.

In a court filing in North Dakota last year, she wrote that she had worked as a contractor since 1996 and had been "a vendor with certain programs associated with USSOCOM," the U.S. Special Operations Command. A spokesman for the command said in an email that its contracting office could find no record of any contract with her.

She claimed in Weaver's documentary that, as an intelligence contractor, she carried out a notorious 2008 intrusion into the State Department's passport records on several presidential candidates. In a separate podcast interview, she said that she retrieved the records on direct orders from John O. Brennan, who then led a private security firm implicated in the incident and was later CIA director. "I went and got them," she said. "He told me to go get them."

A spokesman for Brennan said that Brennan had never heard of Maras-Lindeman.

Maras-Lindeman told The Post that, by its nature, her covert work could not be independently verified. "People like me don't exist," she said. "You just have to trust."

According to a LinkedIn profile that has since been deleted, between 1997 and 2014 Maras-Lindeman obtained eight academic degrees in the United States and the United Kingdom, along with additional professional qualifications. The attorneys in the fraud case said in court filings that they could find records of her earning only one degree, a bachelor's in biology from the University of Kentucky in 2011.

Maras-Lindeman told The Post someone else created the profile — despite claims to the contrary by state attorneys in the fraud case — and she declined to comment on its particulars.

After obtaining the degree, Maras-Lindeman and her family moved to Beaverton, Ore.

She took a voluntary job teaching Greek at Agia Sophia Academy, a private Greek Orthodox school in Beaverton. Her archived biography on the school's website used the title "Dr." and said she had a PhD. Attorneys for North Dakota later said in a court filing in the fraud case that Maras-Lindeman "is not a doctor and does not possess a PhD from any institution."

The school's principal, Christina Blankenstein, said in an email that the school could not vouch for Maras-Lindeman's professional record because her position was unpaid. Maras-Lindeman worked at the school for between a year and two years, Blankenstein said.

In the interview, Maras-Lindeman said the school must have misunderstood paperwork she gave them saying that she was a PhD candidate.

After she moved to North Dakota, Maras-Lindeman asserted in series of small claims court cases that she was a pediatric oncologist, attorneys for North Dakota said in a court filing. As recently as November 2017, a website for a purported cancer research organization named "ML Laboratories" referred to her as "Dr. Tore Maras-Lindeman" and said she was its founder.

Maras-Lindeman also used an email address and Twitter handle identifying herself as "Dr. Lindeman." She told The Post she reserved the accounts so they would be ready for her when she earned a doctoral degree.